DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 229 173 PS 013 553

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TITLE Eventful Play: Preschooler's Scripts for Pretense.
PUB DATE Apr 83
NOTE 15p.; Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development (Detroit, MI, April 21-24, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Discourse Analysis; *Preschool Children; Preschool Education; *Pretend Play; *Research Methodology; *Verbal Communication
IDENTIFIERS *Discourse Organization; Dyadic Communication; *Scripts (Knowledge Structures)

ABSTRACT

Two studies were conducted to analyze script and event structures of preschool children's dialogues during play. To identify scripts in discourse data, the following procedural guidelines were developed and followed: (1) identify exchanges of continuous discourse, (2) delineate all conversational episodes, (3) select all episodes with pretend play themes, (4) extract play events from play episodes, and (5) extract play scripts from interrelated play events. In one study, three dyads (all 4-year-olds) were observed in three different play contexts. Longest and shortest segments of continuous discourse in each dyad were reported for playdough, sandbox, and telephone play. Findings indicated 4-year-old friends used scripts across play contexts to topicalize their longest discourse segments. In a second study, 10 dyads composed of children between 3 and 5 years of age were audiotaped during play with a large sand-filled tub containing various implements. Findings pertained to the role of scripts in structuring all pretend play conversations of each pair. Generally, results revealed that, when engaged in scripted pretense, subjects consistently were able to maintain discourse at or beyond four exchanges and that they shared many play events in their talk. (RH)

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Eventful Play:
Preschooler's Scripts for Pretense

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Paper presented at the biennial meetings of the
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Detroit, April 1983

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Eventful Play:

Preschooler's Scripts for Pretense

The construction and maintenance of shared meaning is a possible outcome of peer play and discourse. Research has documented that children as young as three engage in coherent discourse (Keenan & Klein, 1975; Mueller, 1972) and play collaboratively (Garvey & Berndt, 1977). However, it is not at all clear how children are able to act in concert, without adult mediation to facilitate and extend their interactions. To demystify the process, students of play and discourse have adopted the view that shared meaning is based on shared knowledge. Common knowledge is viewed as essential to the establishment of a discourse topic (Keenan & Schieffelin, 1976) and the constructs of frame (Goffman, 1974), schema (Garvey & Berndt, 1977), script (Schank & Abelson, 1977), and game (Brown, 1980) all implicate event or routine knowledge as important in structuring conversations. Within play itself, scenarios are most successful when their themes are familiar to their young players (Sachs, in press); and both siblings[1] and peers (Garvey & Berndt, 1977; Nelson & Gruendel, 1979) initiate games with themes of everyday routines and activities. For those of us here today, who are attempting to intergrate the role of knowledge in young children's pretense and discourse, the important question is that of investigating the script structure underlying children's pretense conversations.

In order to study scripts for pretense dialogues, I began with the propositions set forth in the paper At Morning It's Lunchtime (Nelson & Gruendel, 1979). In their view, conversations of young children are truly dialogic when participants use shared script knowledge as a framework for conversations. Further, they hypothesized that in scripted-pretense, young children would be able to share specific, temporally organized proposals for joint action and talk. The research I am presenting today was designed to further test their dialogic hypothesis. Before the findings are presented, let us first consider how scripted play relates to general script theory.

Greta Fein (1981) has stated there is no simple relationship between play content and real-life experience. Her statement underscores the necessity for careful description of the possible play-representational connections. Consider Nelson & Gruendel's (1979) description of the three levels of representation comprising event knowledge: the script, a person's verbal or enactive reconstruction of a common event; the event representation, which is the structure of the event in long-term memory, and the event structure, or the event as it occurs in the real world. They acknowledged that the script output of children and adults stands in an uncertain relationship to the underlying representation of the event in long-term memory, and it is just as uncertain precisely how play scripts relate to children event knowledge. However, consideration of the script, the event representation, and the event structure provides hints on how play and event knowledge could be linked. First, it is possible that young children, who are still in the process of building up scripts for everyday events, are predisposed to apply them as a basis for pretense. Second, children may form event representations of play in particular contexts, which they then apply as scripts for play in that context. For example, it is possible that making a cake is a common script for sandbox play. Third, simple modeling of the structure of the event could account for play with familiar themes such as home or school. The relative importance of these processes most likely varies across development, in ways that are as yet unknown. It is nonetheless

clear that children's event knowledge is an important source of content for pretense play.

Thus far, we have considered event knowledge only from an individual's perspective. Cognitive psychologists have traditionally not explored how children use knowledge to act in concert. This is understandable considering the conceptual difficulties in explaining how communicants both use their own and their partner's knowledge to generate unique ideas. Turning to peer discourse, however, we find a way to objectify shared knowledge, as conversations are structured by units that mark shared meaning. This unit, the conversational exchange, is defined as a sequence of two conversational turns in which the discourse partners share a common topic. Turning once again to the proposals of the dialogic hypothesis, the questions that are faced with are whether in pretense discourse, young children use scripts to structure their joint actions and talk, and if this is so, how the script contributes to the development of a pretense theme.

The research to be presented here today reports on two studies analyzing the script and event structure of preschooler's play dialogues. However, since the majority of the script research, thus far, has employed an interview format in which a child is asked to describe a familiar event, it was necessary to develop a procedure to identify scripts in discourse data. Steps in this procedure are shown on the first page of your handout. Once a dyad's verbal interaction is transcribed, one finds the instance of topic sharing by identifying the exchanges of continuous discourse (Keenan & Schieffelin, 1976). The length of the shared interaction is indexed by the number of exchanges in the episode, and pretend play episodes[2] are a subset of all episodes. Reading the pretense episodes, one can then list all the events of play, which are the shared acts of pretense. Finally, a script for play is derived by listing all the inter-related play events from the pretense episodes.

Let us turn to the results of the first study to see how this procedure was used to explore how often scripts are used to structure preschool peer dialogues. In this study, three dyads, all four year olds, were observed in 3 different play contexts. The analysis to be reported on focuses on a comparison between the longest and shortest segments of continuous discourse of each dyad during playdough, sandbox, and telephone play. Sample protocols of long and short episodes from the playdough context are presented on the second page of your handout. As you can see from this example, the longest episode contains what appears to be a restaurant script. In this conversation, M initially sets the pretense context (Make food). This topic immediately becomes elaborated by D, and over the next 7 exchanges, collaboration is smoothly carried out, invoking various roles (e.g., truck driver), locations (grocery store, house), objects and actions that plausibly belong to a shared script. The play events derived from this discourse form a sequentially organized script involving the making, selling, and delivery of hamburgers. As the bottom of page 2 reveals, shortest segments of continuous discourse were generally requests for materials or expressions of affect - and these topics did not contain any play events.

Table 1 displays the scripts and topics of each dyad's longest and shortest discourse segments. The majority of the longest segments of discourse were scripted. Conversations accompanying manipulation of playdough contained scripts for food preparation. In sandbox play, the script that structured talk was birthday party, and for telephone talk, planning a visit was the theme. In sum, four year old friends, across play contexts, use scripts to topicalize their longest discourse segments. Prior research has shown that even toddlers share meaning through action, and as the length of peer interactions increases, shared meaning

becomes more frequent (Brenner & Mueller, 1982). Analogously, preschool peers, though script-structured, extended dialogic exchanges, jointly construct numerous play events, acts which are the substance of their shared meaning.

In the second study, 10 dyads, between 3 to 5 years of age, were audiotaped during play with a large, sand filled tub which contained two shovels, a plastic bucket, a measuring cup, and a large spoon. The findings of this study pertain to the role of the scripts in structuring all the pretend play conversations of each pair derived from their 12 minute play sessions.

In Table 2, on page 4 of your handout, 7 out of 10 preschool dyads had more than one conversational episode with a pretend play theme. An average of 83% of their play episodes had eventful play content. Additionally, whenever a pretend play episode re-emerged in the stream of verbal interaction, it was almost always topically related to the events of play previously established in discourse. So, the finding revealed that events structured more than just one pretense conversation; scripts organized the pretense across the entire verbal interaction. Young children jointly brought into being playdough, egg salad, food, cakes, and a bakery shop.

Dyads of all ages in this play context conversed about a pretend "cake." Although it is unclear how the use of event knowledge in pretend play discourse changes with development, a comparison of the "cake" episodes of 3, 4, and 5 year old dyads is instructive. This comparison reveals that as the age of the dyad increased, so did the number of exchanges and the play events comprising the pretend play discourse. The protocols on page 5 of your handout document these findings. Note that in the youngest dyad, A is able to raise a cake topic, but B is unable to submit another proposal for play that would "make cake" a play event. This pretend cake just fails to rise to the level where it can be a shared pretense, and it never re-emerges in subsequent discourse. The same theme, when repeated by peers who are almost four years old, yields 14 play events. As can be seen in play events 1-5; 7-8; 9-10; and 13-14, the make cake - sing happy birthday sequence is a script for pretense that re-emerges across the entire verbal interaction, providing a reliable mechanism for peers to maintain joint action and talk. Further, it is likely that the script structure allowed for the introduction of a novel play event, making coffee, which follows the cake in adult's birthday parties.

The oldest children's script containing a make cake event was an elaborate, bakery shop scenario, shown on page 6 of your handout. These children produced 26 events of play, and unlike the younger children, they detailed the steps involved in making a cake (play event 1-14). Into their plastic bucket, they added "cup" and "sugar," and, after mixing well, they added peanuts to the fanciful creation. Following this, they gave the cake to a delivery truck (15-16), and they repeated the make cake - give to truck sequence twice more (17-19; 20-24), in two separate play episodes. Finally, when the truck was loaded, they drove away - providing a tidy ending to this narrative-like fantasy. The description of the pretense discourse of 4 and 5 year old dyads highlights the specific contribution of scripts to play. In the sandbox interaction, young children did not engage in fantasy talk all of the time.[2] They also discussed ownership of play materials, and described their realistic manipulations of the play materials. Given the fact that non-play discourse ebbs and flows throughout peer verbal interaction, scripts enabled peers to maintain and develop a fantasy theme throughout the 12 minute play session.

In conclusion, the studies of eventful play particularize how young peers are able to use their event knowledge to engage in pretense conversations. Numerous researchers in the area of mother-child discourse documented that adults "boot strap" the child's discourse to promote the sharing of meaning (Bloom, Rocissano, & Hood, 1976; Brown, 1980; O'Brune, 1975; Cross, 1977). Presumably, young children engaged in discourse have to use each other to share meaning or convey ideas. Previous reports have indicated that attempts to negotiate the linguistic expression of meaning with peers were rarely sustained over more than four exchanges (Shields, 1978). However, my subjects, when engaged in scripted pretense, consistently were able to maintain discourse at or beyond 4 exchanges, and they shared many play events in their talk.

In child-to-child talk, preschoolers are able to stage pretend play dialogues through using scripts. Different play props elicit context-specific scripts for play, and younger children need more realistic props to generate fantasy (Olszewski, & Fuson, 1982; Pederson, Rook-Green, & Elder, 1981). It is apparent that event knowledge is basic to young children's complex discourse achievements. It is as yet uncertain which levels of event knowledge children use in play, and whether the use of scripts for discourse topicalization changes across development. These are questions I will investigate in further research.

Reference Notes

1. Dunn, J., personal communication, 1983.

2. Seidman, S. Child to Child: Discourse content in a single context, in preparation.

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Procedure for Derivation of Shared Scripts for Pretense from Discourse

Step	Operational Definition
1. Identify exchanges of continuous discourse.	Partner turns linked by topic collaboration.
2. Delineate all conversational episodes.	One or more exchanges of continuous discourse; episode ends when a speaker does not address the topic of the preceding turn.
3. Select all episodes with pretend play themes.	Exchanges that evoke or sustain a fantasy or imaginative context.
4. Extract play events from play episodes.	The joint play accomplishments, consisting of at least two sequentially organized proposals or acts of pretense.
5. Extract play scripts from interrelated play events.	All events of play that are interrelated and organized by a common script structure.

Protocols

Dyads in this play session were provided with a small cookie sheet, toy rolling pin, little bowls, and two cans of playdough.

I.		Longest Episode	Play Events
1.	M:	Make food!	Make Food
	D:	Yeah. And everybody get to see a big mac. I'm making a big mac.	Make Big Mac
2.	M:	And we'll sell the food.	Sell Food
	D:	Yeah, but what if the truck don't take the food. The truck has to deliver the food. And the grocery store. And the truck will deliver to the house.	Plan to Deliver Food Establish Delivery Truck
3.	D:	Mister from the truck, will you take it please, please, please.	Approach Truck Driver To Deliver Food
	M:	He said yes, he said yes.	
4.	D:	I'm making a lot of hamburgers. Here you go. It's almost ready.	Make More Hamburgers
	M:	This hs to go to a different house. You doing yours for a different house. I gotta put this back.	Establish Who The Order Is For
5.	D:	Where?	Return Mean To Can
	M:	The can of meat balls.	
6.	D:	I do too. The can of meat balls.	Finish Returning Meat
	M:	All finish.	
7.	D:	Got to shake it a little, then we take it out. Then we put some blue in here. Then shake it.	Shake Meat
	M:	Almost flatter.	Flatten Meat
8.	D:	It ready.	Finish Meat Patty
	M:	I know its ready.	

II.		Shortest Episode	
1.	I:	Let me do it.	
	E:	I didn't finish.	_____
1.	I:	I got the big one.	
	E:	I'm not your friend then.	_____
2.	I:	Here (sulking, she hands E the phone).	
	E:	You're not my friend anymore?	

Table 1

Scripts and Topics of Longest and Shortest Episodes in Three Play Contexts

		Playdough		Sandbox		Telephone	
LONGEST		Script	Number of Exchanges	Script	Number of Exchanges	Script	Number of Exchanges
	DYAD						
	A	Baking	5	Birthday	5	Plan Visit	8
	B	Make Cookies	7	Birthday	2	None	-
	C	Make	8	Birthday	10	Plan Visit	12
SHORTEST		Topic	Number of Exchanges	Topic	Number of Exchanges	Topic	Number of Exchanges
	DYAD						
	A	Request Materials	2	Request Materials	4	Call Doctor	2
	B	Request Materials	1	Play Catch	1	Information on feelings	2
	C	Information on Materials	2	Request Materials	2	Plan Visit	6

Table 2

Frequency and Organization of Eventful Pretense in Peer Conversations

Mean Age of Dyad (months)	Number of Pretense Episodes	Episodes with Eventful Content (%)	Episodes with Related Eventful Content (%)	Script Structure
36	1	0	--	--
36.5	1	0	--	--
45	7	100	86	Make Playdough
46.5	6	100	100	Make Cake
46.5	0	--	--	--
49	5	40	100	Make Egg Salad
58	6	66	100	Make Cake
58.5	6	100	100	Bakery Shop
62	11	91	100	Make Food
63	7	86	100	Make Food

Protocols

"Make Cake" Episodes, Events and Scripts of Sandbox Play

The subjects were audio tape recorded during play in a small room of their day care center. A large, sand filled tub was placed in the corner of the room, containing two shovels, a plastic bucket, a measuring cup, and a large spoon.

Pretend Play Episodes	Play Events
DYAD 1 - Age 36 months	
1. A: More (requesting more sand) B: What you doing?	
2. A: Get the cake B: What? Get the cake?	
DYAD 2 - Age 46.5 months	
1. C: Yeah, I know. You making cake. D: Yeah! (chanting) Who wants cake?	1 Establish Cake 2 Offer Cake
2. C: No it's not finished. You have to get more. D: No, look it!	3 Make More Cake 4 Say Cake Ready
3. C: OK. (singing) "Happy Birthday" That cake. D: OK. Oh, Oh.	5 Sing Happy Birthday
Recycle 1	
4. C: You have to pick up all this. NO! D: The cake. It all ready (singing) Happy Birthday to FaFa Look it! OK I make bigger & bigger & bigger Oh Ah!	6 Request To Move Cake 7 Announce Cake Ready 8 Sing Happy Birthday
5. C: OK (singing) "Happy Birthday, Happy Birthday to you." D: It's too much.	9 Sing Happy Birthday 10 Announce Cake Too BIg
6. C: I have to make. I'm making. I making coffee. D; Yeah. We're pretending. Pretend.	11 Make Coffee
Recycle 2	
7. C: Want to put it in (referring to pretent cake). D: OK. Hold on.	12 Make Cake Again
8. C: (singing) "Happy Birthday to you." Sing, Sing Diana! C&D: "Happy Birthday to you."	13 Sing Happy Birthday
C: I made Happy Birthday right?	14 Announce That You Have Made a Happy Birthday

Protocols
"Make Cake" Episodes, Events and Scripts of Sandbox Play

	Pretend Play Episodes	Play Events
DYAD 3 - 58.3 months		
1. J:	Want to play bakery? Want to play bakery shop? Wanna play bakery shop?	1 Announce Play Bakery Shop
L:	Then we need something else.	2 State "Something" Need To Play
2. J:	A what?	
L:	Make a cake?	3 Suggest Making Cake
3. J:	Yeah	
L:	We can make a cake with the measuring cup.	4 Get Measuring Cup
4. J:	Oh yeah. You have doing and I'll have doing.	5 Add Cups To Bucket
L:	Yeah but. We have to play bakery shop.	6 Announce Play Bakery Shop
5. J:	I know. Make the cake.	7 Announce Must Make Cake
L:	Put in one or more? (referring to cup of sand)	8 Add Cups To Bucket
6. J:	No, put the cake in.	9 Add Cake (Mix?) To Bucket
L:	OK. I put the cake in there.	
7. J:	Put some sugar too.	10 Add Sugar
L:	OK.	
8. J:	Put some sugar.	11 Add Sugar
L:	Have to mix it up.	12 Mix Cake
9. J:	OK.	
L:	How 'bout peanuts.	13 Suggest Peanuts
10. J:	No, no peanuts. Just a little peanuts.	14 Add Peanuts
L:	OK. A little more.	
Recycle 1		
11. J:	Want to give it to the truck now?	15 Establish Truck
L:	OK.	16 Give Cake To Truck
12. J:	Now we have to make another one now.	17 Make Another Cake
L:	I'll make another.	
13. J:	Make believe we have a truck.	18 Locate Pretend Truck
L:	OK, come on. (both make truck noises, Brrrooomm)	19 Bring Cake To Truck
14. J:	Now put it in.	20 Make Cake Again
L:	This is chocolate. Chocolate my flavor.	21 Say Cake Chocolate
15. J:	No don't put chocolate	22 Discuss Adding Chocolate
L:	A little chocolate.	
16. J:	That's chocolate?	23 Change Cake Flavor To Grape
L:	OK, this, this is grape.	
Recycle 2		
17. J:	Put it in the truck. Put it in the truck.	24 Bring Another Cake To The Truck
L:	OK, I get. Truck, I got it in. OK, its in the truck.	
18. J:	OK.	
L:	Get up on the truck.	25 Get in Truck
19. J:	Come on, I'm gonna leave you.	
J&L:	(Brrrooomm) - both drive away)	26 Drive Away